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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 002455

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SUBJECT: ASSISTANT SECRETARY WELCH AND FRENCH DIRECTOR

JEAN-FRANCOIS THIBAULT DISCUSS LEBANON/SYRIA

Classified By: USEU Poloff Van Reidhead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (S) SUMMARY: During a June 21 meeting in Brussels, NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch and French MFA Middle East/North Africa Director Jean-Francois Thibault welcomed the excellent U.S.-France cooperation on Lebanon and agreed that close coordination would remain critical as the new government in Beirut takes shape. Thibault said France was concerned that aggressive steps toward disarming Hizballah could have a destabilizing effect, and urged that we work with the new GOL to find a way to pursue our shared commitment to disarming the militias. He was worried about a punitive UNSCR on arms transfers. In that regard, Welch pushed back, arguing that preventing more arms from reaching Hizballah would put a ceiling on the problem. Thibault said the U.S. and France should communicate that we want "fresh figures" in the new government, although he thought we might still have to tolerate Parliamentary Speaker Berri. Both agreed that maintaining regional stability while promoting reform should be a primary goal. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Thibault was accompanied by Deputy Director (DAS-equivalent) Antione Sivan and Iraq Deskoff Renaud Salins. Assistant Secretary Welch was accompanied by USEU Poloff Van Reidhead (notetaker).

3. (S) During a June 21 bilateral meeting on the margins of the International Conference on Iraq in Brussels, French MFA Middle East/North Africa Director (A/S equivalent) Jean-Francois Thibault welcomed strong U.S.-French cooperation on Lebanon. Summarizing the June 13 Core Group Planning meeting in Paris, he said France was pleased to see the determination of Core Group members to keep the Lebanese government at the center of our engagement and reform efforts. France also welcomed the decision to hold an international conference as soon as possible after the formation of the new government in Beirut. As agreed on June 13 in Paris, France thought it would be very important for Core Group members to work with the new government to identify reform and assistance priorities that the GOL could present at the international conference. The Core Group's job would then be to bring international resources to bear to assist the GOL achieve these priorities. We should strive to boost the new government's credibility and sense of sovereign ownership by keeping the emphasis squarely on the GOL and its needs, Thibault said.

4. (S) Thibault and Assistant Secretary Welch agreed that, having come out on top after the final round of Lebanese voting, the Hariri Bloc had a difficult task ahead of it in forming a new government. Hariri's mandate, while clear, was not strong enough to avoid the tricky task of having to navigate what Thibault called the "triangle of power": first, PM Mikati, who seems to be generally cooperative these days; second, President Lahoud, who "has been a sheep lately but who still has a wolf lurking under the skin;" and third, Parliamentary Speaker Berri, who France saw as the real spoiler. Thibault urged that the U.S. and France communicate that we want "fresh figures" in the new government, and that we will not tolerate the "old and corrupt guard." At the same time, we might be forced by political realities to tolerate Berri to a certain degree, while recognizing that he will "try to play dirty tricks."

5. (S) France remains committed to disarming the militias, Thibault said, but also wants to be careful not to disrupt the "fragile situation" that exists after Syria's withdrawal. We should focus on finding and supporting a "Lebanese solution," he said, one that includes integrating southerners more fully into the economic system. But we should be careful because "pushing them too much could cause a dangerous situation." Assistant Secretary Welch said the U.S. thought it was important to get the UNSC to issue some kind of punitive resolution about arms transfers to non-GOL groups, especially Hizballah. Thibault responded that the region and Lebanon's neighbors would see an embargo as too provocative. We should find out what the new GOL wants to do, because a punitive declaration on arms transfers would be very sensitive, could easily backfire, and would impact how the GOL pursues the recovery of its sovereignty. Assistant Secretary Welch said we would not need to call it an arms

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embargo, since it would be clear what we were trying to accomplish. We just need to find some way to disarm

Hizballah and prevent them from acquiring new arms. It would be very important to have UNSC action by late summer, he said, and the U.S. was confident the Arab states would accept it. Furthermore, France could not argue for patience and a political solution for Hizballah, against EU action to list Hizballah as a terrorist organization and against an arms cutoff. This could easily be seen as protecting Hizballah.

16. (S) Thibault and Assistant Secretary Welch agreed that promoting regional stability should remain a shared goal as we continue our close engagement on reform in Lebanon. While Paris was very disappointed in Bashar al-Asad and was not sympathetic toward his government, the French thought it critical that Syria remain stable and not disintegrate. Assistant Secretary Welch agreed that the disintegration of Syria, despite what we think of the regime, was in nobody's interests.

17. (SBU) Thibault concluded by saying he hoped to travel to Washington over the summer and would like to meet again to discuss other issues, especially the recent deterioration of Morocco-Algeria relations. He and Assistant Secretary Welch agreed that a Washington meeting could be arranged in late July.

(U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.

McKinley

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